MATWATCH
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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

CLASHING SYMBOLS

"Lead, follow, or get out of the way."
---Ted Turner

It is almost a cliche that if there is one human being you don't tick off in the broadcasting business, it is Ted Turner. Forget his against-the-odds accomplishments in the industry. This is a man legendary for avoiding the dilly-dalliers of life.

In recent days, the Turner organization has had conversations with the Global and World Class companies as possible alternatives to the current SuperStation weekend wrestling hours. On the surface, this looks like trading in Coke for Yoo-Hoo. And if you took either of those promotions on their surface value today, that's true.

But what we're dealing with here is more than just groups battling to knock Jim Crockett off the block, it's a battle for a key factor in any promotion's success: television time---and in this instance, time on the most-watched local television station in America.

As I've said for weeks, by the time you get this (and I'll be traveling in Florida so you may know before I), yet another bizarre turn may be taken in the odyssey that has been the NWA's with Ted Turner.

I've been asked by a few MATWATCHers why I am so anxious for a deal between Turner and Crockett. I'm not that interested in Jim Crockett Promotions. They are not the people who will turn the NWA's financial woes around. I believe with the right people at the helm, within a matter of months, a Turner NWA would look sounds better than the mess it's in today. Not that Flair-Luger isn't a great series, not that Tully & Arn vs. the Midnight Express hasn't been a bit of inspiration. But those appear to me to be more short-term answers to long-term problems. And I'm no more convinced today that anyone in the JCP offices in a position of power has thought much beyond this fall.

How the Crocketts have botched what would have almost been a sweetheart deal to bail them out of debt would be astounding were it not so historically typical. As one insider told MATWATCH last week, "Jim would probably have long since made this deal. But the rest of the Crocketts, namely David and Frances, simply don't take this situation seriously. They just can't make it financially without a partner with the debt they're in." I won't tell you the words used to describe some of the family because I'm not that cruel and I have no personal grudges with the people. But I find equally amazing their apparent lack of realization of who they're dealing with here.

At least two sources have told me they feel the Crocketts have crossed the barrier of Turner's patience. I don't blame him. But I'm not sure I'd align myself with any existing promotion. I'd certainly be suspicious of Global because they're hardly a major mark on the wrestling map. At least World Class has some history and credibility behind it (at least more than Global) but again, that group has had its share of problems since 1986.

The Turner organization is a big conglomerate. They want to be in the wrestling business because pro wrestling is SuperStation-proof programming. With new FCC guidelines set to take effect in April which will force cable companies to delete programs on a distant station that are already shown in a local market ("Gilligan's Island," "The Andy Griffith Show," etc.), WTBS needs all of the first-run original product it can get and, believe me, over one year, a $4-$5 million budget for pro wrestling is not that expensive considering the number of hours it can fill, including prime-time specials which draw good ratings.

In my opinion, the Turner people need to start afresh---maybe try to sign away a Flair, a Sting, the Road Warriors, possibly bring back The Freebirds, and go after enough talent that can be rotated and not grow stale. But beyond that, surely there has to be a creative mind out there which has a new idea, a new concept to freshen the packaging of pro wrestling. Vince McMahon accomplished it handsomely in 1984 but one man probably delayed Vince's commanding dominance by at least two years---Ted Turner when he threw Vince off WTBS in the spring of '85.

I don't have the fresh idea, I don't know the person, and I wouldn't know the steps one would take to get that idea across. But if the doors of TBS are open to alternatives to the Crocketts and it appears they are, I sincerely hope they search every possible avenue to find the right idea and concept for WTBS wrestling. Heaven knows, we need a new approach now.

(SPECIAL NOTE: the TV reviews are abbreviated this week due to my vacation but we'll be back to a full lineup next week.)

COMINGS & GOINGS

---Ted Turner is also getting the advice to start his own wrestling company, no matter what, and simply hire the right wrestling man tc run it and turn the TV production over to his skilled TBS professionals. Sounds like the soundest advice to me.

---Crowds of nearly 14,000 at The Omni, 16,000 to open the new Charlotte Coliseum, and a sellout in Columbus certainly doesn't sound shabby at all, but if you only realized the debt the Crocketts were in, you'd realize this is like a financial mirage.

---Expect Joe Pedicino to have two good shows from Puerto Rico on PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK after last weekend's "Legends of World Class" offering. Taking the show on the road has been a good move and ---as a personal view---Joe functions far better without Patrick Schaefer as a foil.

---Results from the 8/28 CWF show in Montgomery: Austin Idol won by DQ over Eddie Gilbert when the Dangerous Alliance interfered (told it was a good match but Burrhead Jones---handcuffed to Paul E. Dangerously---was terrible); Willie B. Hert KO'd Alan Martin in the 5th round of a boxing match (it started out with Dangerously who begged off after the 2nd round because of a "football injury") and Missy Hyatt slapped Martin good afterward; The D.I. and Detroit Demolition went to a draw with the Southern Boys; Lord Humongous/Shane Douglas kept the CWF tag titles against Sika & Martin; Mr. Olympia (Jerry Stubbs) turns heel again in match against Nightmare Freddie.

---Terry Gordy is the final addition to the Road to Birmingham CWF title tourney but I've been told not to expect the seedings to be followed as announced.

---Jerry Lawler will not defend the AWA title against Bigelow. Two reasons: Jerry Jarrett is now reluctant to release Lawler on a Monday night from Memphis and some legit heat now exists between the CWA and CWF over the FNN telecasts. Response to the CWF shows is up two-to-one over Memphis and Jarrett has been told when FNN/SCORE pre-empts for alternate sports from now on, the CWA will be preempted, not Continental.

---With Lawler off the ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM, guess who is being mentioned as a sub opponent for Bam Bam? David Schultz. Yep, THE Dr. D. Reports are Schultz contacted Randy Culley with interest in working a few CWF shows. Rotsa ruck.

---Scheduled 8/27 in Columbus GA: Tully & Arn rematch vs. Midnight Express, Flair in an unannounced match, Sting vs. Barry Windham and others.

---World Class, the AWA, and Memphis will run a joint show in The Omni in Atlanta October 30. World Class has already begun promoting it on its show and on one of the recent PWTW shows from Dallas. A Lawler-Kerry Von Erich title match headlines the card.

---Some interesting sidelights to that situation: (1) The last non-NWA or non-WWF show to run at the Omni was the successful UWF show which drew 8,500 in the spring of '87 when Terry Taylor cost himself and Chris Adams the UWF tag belts; (2) the 3 groups are relying heavily on a big push from the indomitable Pedicino and his SUPERSTARS show since he airs all three; (3) this will be a big test to see how much impact Joe's move to TV69 in Atlanta has as an attendance-builder; and (4) this would be after the estimated date Ted Turner would be making a decision on the NWA's SuperStation status. If he negotiates seriously with World Class....??????

---David Woods continues to run repeats of Ron Fuller's defunct USA Wrestling in its regular 10 a.m. Saturday slot on his flagship station in Montgomery. Reruns can't be an added boost to push the CWF.

---Young Joey Maggs is getting a mild push with the Southern group (he's the kid who Eddie Gilbert destroyed on the Fox Late Show in June) as Tommy Rich's second designated Southern tag team co-champion (the other one: Steve Prichard after Ted Oates left).

---USA TODAY'S Jeannie Williams gushed over SUMMER SLAM in her column Aug. 31. Jeannie obviously knows nothing about wrestling....she basically reviewed the few celebrities in sight.

---Give some credit to the Von Erichs: they're smart enough to give that hot Samoan Swat Team a belt, even if people are lackadaisical about titles today.

---As for another rising face I'd like to see picked up by a major group...what about Mando Guererro? The recent matches he's wrestled on the AWA ESPN show have been nothing sort of sensational. If somebody will let that guy wrestle and not bog him down or belittle him with an ethnically insulting character, this guy has a lot of promise.

---If any of you MATWATCHers participate in one of the new "rotisserie wrestling leagues," drop me a line. I'd like to know how they operate and if they're as realistic as the rotisserie baseball circuits.

---On Page 3, you'll see my detailed post-mortem on the WWF SUMMER SLAM, but I honestly believe a show like that could receive a real catalyst by introducing a breakthrough performer in a big way. Wouldn't it have been ideal to have Owen Hart come out and get involved in a 6-man brawl during the end of the Demolition/Harts match? I suppose Vince felt it would have taken too much excitement from the finale.

---Some program notes: LEARNING THE ROPES, the Lyle Alzado comedy with NWA wrestlers, has cleared WNYW, Ch. 5 in New York. That gives it 24 of the top 25 markets. Also, NWA MAIN EVENT has now moved to 6:05 (EDT) on Sundays if you haven't already tuned it out, on WTBS.

---There will definitely be some roster cuts from some of the USA performers inherited in the buyout by CWF. Until the Stubbs turn, and counting the incoming Brian Pillman and expected Tim Horner, Continental would have had 17 faces and nine heels of primary value, so either some cuts or turns have to be made. Plus, I simply don't think they can yet afford that many performers.

---The CWF announcers and wrestlers really spent some time burying former g.m. Jack Curtis during August. We'd heard it wasn't a pleasant departure but this guy has been branded a crook on-air.

---I don't know if a lot of politics would get in the way of this, but I have a suggestion for one way to boost the gate for that Oct. 30 Omni show: bring in a number of the great Georgia old-timers...names like Tim Woods, Louie Tillet, Buddy Fuller, Sputnik Monroe, Buddy Colt, Nick Bockwinkel, Ernie Ladd, Enrique and Ramon Torres, and Butcher Vachon, and let them meet the fans, sign autographs, and be recognized during the matches. Those are some nostalgic names in the Peach State people would love to see.

---We'll revert back to the all-computer format next week. This issue may have arrived a shade early. Next week, we'll be one day late: I'm taking my wife on a much deserved week's vacation fron the academic wars. So the mailout of next week's issue will be on the 13th. By the way, if you watch the Auburn-Kentucky game on TBS Sept. 10 or the Auburn-Tennessee game on CBS Sept. 24, the voice of the public service "visit to the Auburn campus" at halftime will be mine.

SUMMER SLAM '88: POST-MORTEM

The week the Turner deal nearly closed, I'd prepared this column on redefining the word "supercard." If I were Webster, I'd call it: "a professional wrestling event designed for a national television audience (largely for pay-TV viewers) in which a wrestling promotion is predisposed to present its best creative product in a fashion which overshadows its usual nightly work." If that's the definition, SUMMER SLAM '88 wasn't one.

Oh, there were good things: the usual quality WWF opening titles, sharp ringside camerawork, a hot crowd on a summer night, enough heat for the finale gimmick to keep a viewer from being worn out as during that excruciating debacle on March 29, and a title change though if, as Gorilla kept reminding us, "wrestling history has been made," it has to go down as one of the biggest jokes of a match in grappling history.

But I get the idea that when the WWF decided to do four pay-per-view shows per year, they had to have one that was basically a throwaway, a one-match card to get our $14.95. And I imagine in a few days we'll find out enough of us shelled out our $14.95s to make them a nice if not outrageous profit.

What wasn't right? For one thing, the overall production seemed a bit off. The scene-setters, while good, were not as sharp as usual and looked like second-generation dubs. The announcing was the worst of any PPV or major live show this year (except for the short segment Steve Williams was on CLASH II) as Gorilla kept exhorting us worse than Vince (that's saying a lot) about how great the whole show was and Billy Graham couldn't mouth a sentence without "my main man" or "bruhthuh" and it lacked the humor we used to get in Dizzy Dean's "podnuh" on old baseball games.

As for the wrestling, what little of it there was, we saw at least seven bad matches that I wouldn't have paid for a ticket to see (I didn't pay for the PPV either, thanks to a good friend). I felt particularly sorry for Ken Patera. The man really looked old in his 5 minutes with Bad News Brown, who looked little better. It's clearly evident that the Powers of Pain's honeymoon heat is already over and I'm honestly tired of the WWF trying to make me believe Koko B. Ware, Dino Bravo, Wayne Farris, Jim Nelson (Boris Zhukov), Nikolai Volkoff, or Junkfood Dog belong on a show like this. Some of these fellows have had their day but several of them are at the point of being "et up with Virgilitis," a disease of being past one's prime.

I won't even devote a whole paragraph to the Brother Love dud. But it does indicate to me that Vince doesn't have the pull on the celebrity circuit he did even two years ago (I'm told Sugar Ray Leonard and Jessica Hahn both rejected this spot. I wonder if Ric Flair did, too).

Why couldn't we have seen some fresh face such as Curt Hennig or Terry Taylor (or would it have been too much to ask for Owen Hart?).

Plus, they should never let Gene Okerlund do another boxing interview. Some of his questions were inane and the long talking heads with Donny Lalonde were boring.

As for the finale, well Hulk still has his followers but it didn't seem like a 1985 Hulk Hogan welcome and I think the next nine months or so will tell us whether a new generation will find him as magnetic as those who may be in junior high now. I somehow felt I'd seen that match before somewhere. Jesse didn't do a thing that Tommy Young or Dave Hebner wouldn't have. I felt DiBiase was great but they absolutely destroyed him at the end to the point that I wonder if he can continue to get over as Savage's foil.

As for Liz's legs, I certainly didn't turn my back but I have to tell you: we've seen more in a Missy Hyatt music video or in Dirty White Girl run-ins in the CWF.

Overall, here's my scale (out of 25 maximum points) as you've read in The Observer: Overall Production 3.7, Quality of Matches, 2.0; Crowd Enthusiasm, 4.2; Announcing 1.8; Overall Excellence of Show, 2.5. TOTAL: 14.2...better than WM4 but just slightly lower than the Bash.

CLASH III: A PREVIEW

This ain't gonna be one either but it has to beat CLASH II if they don't have three run-in DQ finishes. This has to be the worst-promoted of the three CLASH cards on WTBS, thanks to Mr. Runnels who believes they hurt arena crowds afterward (funny, SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT doesn't seem to hurt WWF attendance). Two weeks ago, this was barely mentioned on the Saturday TBS show.

Wednesday night, we'll see Uncle Ivan "officially" turn though he's already been knocked out by Ronnie Garvin in three Bash cities. Brad Armstrong will go to either a draw or DQ win over Mike Rotunda in the TV title match (it's a shame Brad doesn't get the kind of push to give him a belt but don't look for it). You can bet the Horsemen will do a run-in to keep Sting from getting the U.S. belt from Barry Windham and if there is a clean pinfall the whole night, it'll happen in the Texas Outlaws beating Kevin Sullivan and Al Perez but don't rule out a DQ here in Dusty's creative wisdom.

If I felt there was legit chance of Sting getting the belt (and frankly, I still think he's the one who ought to be pushed against Flair to an ultimate victory rather than Luger), or if Brad were given a fair shot, I might get up for this one, but it's all too predictable. The best thing I can say about CLASH is that it's live and at least they can't completely give away the endings to anything but common sense.

Another one of these things is on the WTBS agenda for Dec. 7. Maybe there will be a new force behind it by then.

PARTING BLOWS: PWTW reverts to its old hour format Oct. 1 with much more action footage, ring reports and an Insider segment that should breathe new life into the show.

---That Columbus show on 9/27 is an NWA TV taping with Murdoch-Perez also scheduled.

TV TEMPO (Weekend of Sept. 2-4)

RATING KEY: PINFALL! - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent. POWERSLAM - Good. DRAW - Average. RESTHOLD - Fair. BOMB - Poor. PLUS for Midscale rating.

(W. CLASS) - Black Bart/J.J. Funk double countout with Matt Borne/Bill Irwin; Iceman Parsons d. Steve Casey; Manuel Villalobos d. Ron Ellis; Kevin Von Erich d. Bob Bradley; Shaun Simpson d. John Tatum in match that ends in wild melee. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

(WWC) - Ricky Santana d. El Profe; Victor Jovica d. El Exotica; Brad & Bart Batten win WWC tag team title from Ninja Express. ANGLE: Awards ceremony where Hercules Ayala attacks Carlos Colon and Colon's wife. DRAW.

(MEMPHIS) - Arena matches: Phil Hickerson d. Cat Garrett; Billy Travis/Scott Steiner d. RPMs when Lane and Davis collide with each other; Bill Dundee DQ over Hickerson when Stud Stable attacks Dundee; Studio: RPMs d. Alan Raper/Bob King; Cactus Jack Foley/Gary Young/Jimmy Golden d. Baxter/Steiner/Ray Odyssey. ANGLES: Foley & RPMs introduced as new Stud Stable members; Dundee challenges Downtown Bruno to a match with his son Jamie (who's a face here). The Stable comes in and attacks Bill before Jamie and several faces come for the save. POWERSLAM-PLUS.

(NWA) - MAIN EVENT: (repeats from NWA Pro) Sheepherders draw with Lightning Express (goodbye, Tim); Sting/Nikita Koloff DQ over Tully & Arn when Barry Windham attacks and claws Sting who juices until Nikita saves with a chair; from Bash: The Fantastics d. Midnight Express/Jim Cornette in 2-on-3 bunkhouse match. DRAW...because this show is no better than average when it repeats matches from other shows and does the studio voiceovers instead of live commentary.

(CWF) - Lord Humongous/Shane Douglas keep CWF tag titles on reverse decision over Ken Wayne/Nightmare Freddie when The Bullet tells ref of Sika/Alan Martin interference; Detroit Demolition/The D.I./Mark Pyle d. Rick Hazzard/Bobo Brazil Jr./Lee Peek; Nelson Royal d. Danny Davis to keep World Jr. Heavyweight title when Wayne interferes; Austin Idol d. The Renegade. ANGLES: Ron West cancels plans to suspend Eddie Gilbert/Paul E. Dangerously; David Woods appears to sign Wayne and Davis to hair vs. hair match at ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM with Davis putting his IROC-Z car up against "$25,000" of Wayne. POWERSLAM-PLUS...good action.

SUMMER SLAM HIGH(LOW)LIGHTS

BEST LINES - 1. GORILLA: "Look at the size of the cranium on Boris." GRAHAM: "You mean his head?" 2. JIM DUGGAN: "This is the WWF. It's not Sunday School." 3. BOBBY HEENAN: "Does Graham get a lot of fan mail? He would but he ran out of stamps."

BEST PICTURES - 1. Liz's legs. 2. Regis Philbin flexing his muscles at ringside. 3. Jesse Ventura's dumbfounded take after Elizabeth peels off her skirt. 4. Shot of Bret Hart's slingshot of Jim Neidhart over-the-rope onto Barry Darsow. 5. Opening title sequence.

BEST POSTER - THE DOCTOR OF STYLE with a picture of a donkey (ass).

ALL-CLICHE TEAM - 1. GORILLA, "History has already been made." 2. GORILLA, "Only time will tell." 3. GRAHAM, "He's my main man, bruhthuh."

WORST LEAD-IN QUESTION - GENE OKERLUND: "We asked the WBC light heavyweight champion if he indeed 'suckered' Sugar Ray into this fight."

WORST BOXING INTERVIEW - MEAN GENE.

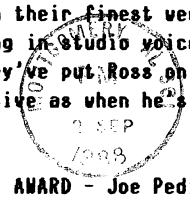
DREADED GLITCH - 1. Technical problems with highlight footage of Donny Lalonde which didn't appear when Gene called for them. 2. Apparent delay in Anabolic Warrior's entrance.

OTHER TV HIGHLIGHTS

LINE OF THE WEEK - Jim Ross, NWA: "He (Kevin Sullivan) sinks lower than a bass swimming away from a fishhook."

NICKNAME OF THE WEEK - Ross, for dubbing Jimmy Garvin & Precious "America's Couple." Hope they're better than "America's Team" on the SuperStation.

BOO AWARD - NWA, for continuing to devalue what should have been their finest weekly hour, NWA MAIN EVENT by persisting in studio voiceovers and rerun matches. At least they've put Ross on the show but he's not nearly as effective as when he's in the heat of a wild arena finish.



GOOD LUCK AWARD - Joe Pedicino, wishing you well on your move to WWEU in Atlanta and may SUPERSTARS thrive!

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